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ABSTRACT

The National Library Service for the Blind and Physically Handicapped (NLS), Library of Congress, administers a free national library program of Braille and recorded materials for eligible individuals residing in the United States or for citizens living abroad. Under a special provision of the U.S. copyright law and with the permission of authors and publishers of works not covered by the provision, NLS selects and produces full-length books and magazines in Braille and recorded formats. Reading materials and necessary audio equipment are distributed to a cooperating network of regional and local libraries where they are then circulated directly to eligible borrowers. This paper discusses the NLS in three main sections. The first section, "Background," discusses funding; eligibility; book collection; magazines; equipment and accessories; music services; volunteer services; Braille competency; reference; consumer relations; and research and development. The second section focuses on non-English materials: production; Spanish-language collection; bibliographic control; service to Spanish-speaking users in the U.S.; and the foreign language plan. The last section discusses international cooperation. (AEF)

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Building a National Service in a Multilingual Environment

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"ACCOMMODATING ALL" CONFERENCE

The Association of Caribbean University Research
and Institutional Libraries
and
The International Federation of Library Associations Section
of Libraries for the Blind

Ocho Rios, Jamaica
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BACKGROUND

The National Library Service for the Blind and Physically Handicapped (NLS), Library of Congress, administers a free national library program of braille and recorded materials for eligible individuals residing in the U.S. or for citizens living abroad. Under a special provision of the U.S. copyright law and with the permission of authors and publishers of works not covered by the provision, NLS selects and produces full-length books and magazines in braille and recorded formats. Some music materials are produced in large print. Reading materials and necessary audio equipment are distributed to a cooperating network of regional and subregional (local) libraries where they are then circulated directly to eligible borrowers. Both reading materials and playback machines are sent to borrowers and returned to libraries by postage-free mail. Established by an act of Congress in 1931 to serve blind adults, the program was expanded in 1952 to include children, in 1962 to provide music materials, and again in 1966 to include individuals with physical conditions that prevent the reading of standard print books.

Funding

The NLS program is funded annually by Congress. The fiscal year 2002 appropriation is $49,778,000. Regional and subregional libraries receive funding from state, local, and federal sources.

Through an additional appropriation to the U.S. Postal Service, books and materials are mailed as "Free Matter for the Blind or Handicapped." The combined expenditure for the program is approximately $166 million annually.

Eligibility

Anyone who is unable to read or use standard printed materials as a result of temporary or permanent visual or physical limitations may receive service. A survey sponsored by the Library of Congress found that two million persons with some type of visual impairment are eligible and another one million individuals with physical conditions such as paralysis, missing arms or hands, lack of muscle coordination, or prolonged weakness could benefit from the use of reading materials in recorded form.

Book Collection

Books are selected on the basis of their appeal to people with a wide range of interests. Bestsellers, biographies, fiction, and how-to books are in great demand. A number of titles are produced in Spanish. Registered borrowers learn of new books added to the collection through two bimonthly publications, *Braille Book Review* and *Talking Book Topics*. Through a union catalog available on the Internet and on CD-ROM, every network library has access to the entire NLS book collection and to the resources of several cooperating agencies.

Magazines

More than seventy magazines on audio cassette and in braille are offered through the program. Readers may request free subscriptions to such magazines as *U.S. News and World Report, National Geographic, Consumer Reports, Good Housekeeping,* and *Sports Illustrated for Kids*. Current issues are mailed directly to readers at the same time the print issues appear, or shortly thereafter. Magazines are selected in response to demonstrated reader interest through a sophisticated inquiry process.

Equipment and Accessories

Playback equipment is loaned free for as long as recorded materials provided by NLS and its cooperating libraries are being borrowed. (Our current requirement is for at least one item to be borrowed in a 12-month period.) Cassette machines are designed for cassette books and magazines recorded at 15/16 ips and the standard speed of 1-7/8 ips on 2 and 4 tracks. Talking-book machines are designed to play disc books recorded at 8 rpm and 16 rpm. Readers with significantly limited mobility may request a remote-control unit. Hearing-impaired readers may be eligible for an auxiliary amplifier for use with headphones. A cassette machine designed primarily for persons with limited manual dexterity is also available.

Plans are for digital audio service to be initiated in 2008.

Music Services

Persons interested in music materials may receive them directly from the NLS Music Section. The collection consists of scores in braille and large print; textbooks and books about music in braille and large print; music appreciation cassettes, including interviews and opera lectures; and self-instructional cassettes for voice, piano, organ, electronic keyboard, guitar, recorder, accordion, banjo, and harmonica.

Volunteer Services

Free correspondence courses leading to certification in braille transcribing (literary, music, and mathematics braille) and braille proofreading are offered. Training in audio book production is available on request to local recording groups. A directory of volunteer groups that produce books for libraries and individuals is published on a regular basis. Volunteers may, and often do, call on NLS staff for their expertise in braille transcription and recording techniques.

Braille Competency

A free test is now available to demonstrate competence in reading and writing literary braille. It was designed primarily for classroom and rehabilitation teachers. It is available in both print and braille versions from the NLS Braille Development Section.

Reference

Questions on various aspects of blindness and physical

disabilities may be sent to NLS or to any network library. This service is available without charge to individuals, organizations, and libraries. Publications of interest to people with disabilities and to service providers are free on request.

Consumer Relations

The consumer relations officer maintains regular contact with consumer groups and individual users of the program to identify and resolve service problems and to assure that users' needs are being met. Participating in surveys, evaluating new equipment, and serving on advisory committees are some of the ways in which consumers contribute to program development. Regular meetings with leaders of organized consumer groups are held at least once each year.

Research and Development

The NLS research program is directed toward improving the quality of reading materials and playback equipment, controlling program costs, and reducing the time required to deliver services to users. Current research activities include (1) the development of a standard for digital talking books, (2) the application of digital techniques to NLS recorded materials, and (3) the investigation of methods for producing braille books directly from publishers' files.

For Further Information

For more information about the program and how to apply for

service, it is best to go directly to <**www.loc.gov/nls**>.

NON-ENGLISH MATERIALS

In 1978 the National Library Service for the Blind and Physically Handicapped formally established a Foreign Language Program to serve the reading needs of the increasing numbers of blind and physically handicapped persons in the United States who speak and read languages other than English. The three major objectives of this program are: (1) building a collection of foreign-language recorded and braille materials at NLS, (2) facilitating the circulation of foreign-language materials to readers through a network of cooperating libraries for the blind and physically handicapped, and (3) identifying and promoting other sources that produce special media materials in various languages.

The NLS foreign-language collection includes books and magazines produced in special media by NLS as well as recorded and braille books acquired from sources outside NLS. Fifty-four languages are represented among the foreign-language titles produced by NLS that are duplicated in quantity, interfiled with the English-language titles produced by NLS, and distributed to the NLS network of cooperating libraries. Recorded and braille materials acquired from sources outside NLS are deposited in the Special Foreign Library

Collection, which is housed at and circulated from a single national site at our multistate center located in Cincinnati, Ohio.

To help readers and librarians locate materials in the NLS collections as well as find special media materials from other sources, NLS produces a number of catalogs, bibliographies, directories, and reference circulars that are available free of charge to interested persons.

Production

Foreign-language books and magazines selected for production by NLS are reproduced in the same way as English-language books and magazines selected for the collection. Like the English-language titles, the foreign-language titles are high-quality reproductions of full-length, published works.

Some cooperating libraries have produced or acquired their own collections of materials in foreign languages. The regional library serving blind and physically handicapped people in the state of Texas has produced a large collection of recorded titles in Spanish, using volunteer narrators. The NLS cooperating library in Michigan has produced a number of recorded titles in Finnish; the NLS cooperating library in Minnesota has acquired recorded materials in Swedish; the cooperating library in New Jersey has produced recorded titles in Polish; and cooperating libraries in New England have produced talking

books in French, Italian, and Portuguese. Other NLS cooperating libraries have plans to initiate local recording programs with the assistance of volunteer and ethnic groups.

Spanish-Language Collection

NLS now has a collection of about 4,200 recorded and braille titles in Spanish. Roughly half these titles are audio books and half are in braille. Although a small proportion of the 347,231 special-media titles in the NLS catalog, the titles in Spanish represent a significant collection that has been built in the last sixteen years and will continue to grow.

To a great extent, NLS has built its Spanish-language collection by selecting print books and magazines and arranging to have them narrated onto tape or transcribed into braille. Audio titles are duplicated in quantities of up to 500. The copies are distributed as part of the NLS regular collection to the 136 network libraries for circulation to Spanish-speaking users. NLS also acquires copies of Spanish-language recorded and braille books produced by other libraries and organizations. These materials are kept in a limited-copy Special Foreign Library Collection that is maintained and circulated separately from the NLS regular collection. In addition, a few of the cooperating libraries in the NLS network produce and circulate other recorded books and magazines in Spanish.

Spanish-speaking persons who subscribe to the NLS national reading program now have access to talking-book editions of the classics of Spanish literature. Modern and contemporary Hispanic writers from nearly all Spanish-speaking countries are represented in the talking-book collection, for example, Argentina, Chile, Costa Rica, Cuba, El Salvador, Guatemala, Uruguay, Venezuela.

Hispanic writers living the United States are also represented in the collection with works by Mexican-American authors such as Jaime Carrero, Rolando Hinojosa, Daniel Venegas, and Carlos Mellizo; and Cuban-American authors José Sánchez Broudy, Mireya Robles, Omar Torres, and Roberto Fernández.

NLS also offers recorded editions of classic works that have been translated into Spanish and other languages. These include Spanish-language editions of works by Emily Bronte, Pearl Buck, Agatha Christie, Joseph Conrad, Edmundo de Amicis, Daniel Defoe, Charles Dickens, Dostoevsky, Dumas, Faulkner, F. Scott Fitzgerald, Goethe, Hemingway, Victor Hugo, James Joyce, Kafka, Rudyard Kipling, Jack London, Thomas Mann, Edgar Allan Poe, Pushkin, Solzenitzyn, Steinbeck, Robert Louis Stevenson, Tolstoi, Mark Twain, Jules Verne, Oscar Wilde, and others.

Bibliographic Control

All special-media titles in the NLS program, whether produced

by NLS, acquired from other sources, or produced by cooperating libraries, are listed in the *NLS International Union Catalog*.

New English and Spanish-language titles produced by NLS are listed in the bimonthly publication *Talking Book Topics*. A cumulative listing of Spanish-language titles produced by NLS may be found in the large-print catalog, *Foreign Language Books 1993* and *Books in Spanish 1994-2000*. A Spanish-language bibliography of titles available from NLS and cooperating libraries is also available from the publication *Foreign Language Referral Bibliographies and Source Documents*. These catalogs and bibliographies are available free of charge to NLS users, cooperating libraries, and any other interested organizations, foreign or domestic, that deal with the needs of blind and physically handicapped persons.

Service to Spanish-speaking Users in the United States

Of the more than 696,000 readership in the NLS programs, approximately 10,500 have been identified as primarily Spanish-reading. NLS expects this number to increase significantly as awareness of the service reaches potential new readers. NLS estimates the potential total of its Spanish-speaking readers to be as large as 50,000.

To a great extent, the effectiveness of the NLS Spanish-language program depends on the ability of the cooperating libraries to

identify eligible Spanish-speaking readers and connect the service with them. To assist in this effort, NLS produces and distributes Spanish-language application forms, brochures, factsheets, catalogs, machine-use instructions, and other publications to facilitate service.
A toll-free telephone number is also available for Spanish-speaking persons to find out more about the NLS program.

NLS has also produced seven Spanish-language public service announcements (PSAs) for television, radio, and newspapers. The PSAs explain the services and materials available from NLS. One television PSA is an animated tour of our "talking-book factory"; another features actress Rita Moreno explaining the availability of talking books to eligible blind and physically handicapped persons.

During the early 1990s, NLS undertook a Spanish-language outreach effort to draw more eligible persons into the service. Work began with a pilot program in Puerto Rico involving a media campaign of radio, television, and newspaper announcements to publicize the existence of the service. As a result of this, the number of users of the library service in Puerto Rico increased by 100 percent.

Despite this outreach, there continue to be many cooperating libraries that do not have bilingual staff or programs to explain the service to Spanish-speaking individuals. In these cases, English-speaking librarians must depend to a great extent on bilingual

volunteers, special-interest groups, social workers, family members, or others to explain the service to, and communicate the needs of, patrons and potential patrons who do not speak English. In this regard, it is important for all bilingual professionals in the fields of health and social science as well as bilingual librarians to know about the existence of the service and to promote its use.

Plan

Recognizing the need to improve and expand its foreign-language program, NLS codified the policies and activities of the program into a three-phase foreign-language plan. Following this plan, NLS attempts to identify and coordinate the activities and resources of relevant organizations in both the private and public sector to promote development of foreign-language special-media collections and enhance outreach efforts to eligible users. One of the first tangible results was the translation into Spanish of our technical specifications for narrating Spanish-language books.

INTERNATIONAL COOPERATION

For many years NLS has cooperated with libraries and organizations for the blind outside the United States. Indeed, NLS was the conceiving agency and one of the founding members of the Section of Libraries for the Blind (SLB) of the International Federation of Library Associations. As a part of IFLA, the Section of Libraries for

the Blind meets annually and continues to work for the international standardization of special-media reading materials and for the elimination of barriers to the international flow of materials for the blind. NLS exchanges its catalogs, directories, and other print publications with libraries and organizations for the blind outside the U.S. Recorded and braille books produced by NLS are available on international interlibrary loan to foreign libraries and organizations that serve the reading needs of blind and physically handicapped persons. NLS also offers to make arrangements for the sale of its braille and talking books and magazines to eligible organizations abroad.

NLS materials and services available abroad are detailed in the publication "NLS Materials and Services Available to Overseas Libraries and Agencies Serving the Reading Needs of Blind and Physically Handicapped Persons." This publication is available in both Spanish and English.

In cooperation with Spanish-speaking countries, NLS has acquired braille and talking books in Spanish from the Organización Nacional de Ciegos Españoles (ONCE) in Madrid and exchanges official publications with the World Blind Union.

In Latin America, NLS has acquired Spanish-language braille books from the Comité Internacional Pro Ciegos in Mexico City. Other Latin American organizations with which NLS maintains contact

include la Editora Nacional Braille of Argentina, el Instituto Nacional de Ciegos of Colombia, el Patronato Nacional de Ciegos of Costa Rica, la Unión Latinoamerica para Ciegos of the Dominican Republic, el Patronato Luz del Ciego of Panama, la Fundación Braille of Uruguay, la Fundación Aurelio Morillo of Venezuela, and Fundação para o Livro do Cego of Brazil.

SUMMARY

In summary, the National Library Service for the Blind and Physically Handicapped is interested in serving those who read in any language and is prepared to assist any organization wishing to establish a program or borrow materials through the interlibrary loan process. The first step in arranging a consultation is contacting NLS at <fcyl@loc.gov>.

Credit

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